

Developing Qualifications for Accreditation

A Guide for Awarding Bodies

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An Assurance of Quality

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1 Introduction

This document is for awarding bodies (ABs) to use when designing, developing and reviewing qualifications and units for SQA Accreditation. It is designed to help support you in meeting Regulatory Principles 10 to 13 from SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Principles (2021).

Regulatory Principle 10. The awarding body must ensure that its systems and processes for the identification, design, development, implementation and review of qualifications and assessments are fit for purpose.

Regulatory Principle 11. The awarding body must ensure that its qualifications portfolio is effectively managed, maintained and reviewed.

Regulatory Principle 12. The awarding body and its providers must ensure that they have the necessary arrangements and resources required to manage and administer qualification delivery and assessment.

Regulatory Principle 13. The awarding body and its providers must ensure that they have systems and processes which ensure the effective quality assurance of accredited qualifications.

Only awarding bodies approved by SQA Accreditation may seek qualification accreditation with us. This guidance explains our qualification accreditation process and should assist you in developing and reviewing your qualifications in preparation for accreditation. It should be used alongside *Guidance for Completion of Form AC2 Qualification Accreditation* which accompanies the AC2 (the form required for a formal accreditation request.)

Throughout the document we have used the term 'standards setting organisation (SSO)' to include sector skills councils, sector bodies and standards setting bodies, as well as partnerships of these organisations. We continue to use the term 'awarding body' to describe organisations that are approved by SQA Accreditation to offer accredited qualifications. For further information, advice and support in implementing the guidance, please speak to your Accreditation Manager (AM) or contact SQA Accreditation:

- ◆ E-mail: accreditation@sqa.org.uk
- ◆ Website: <https://accreditation.sqa.org.uk/accreditation/home>

1.1 What do you need to develop?

For the purposes of accreditation, you need to develop:

- ◆ a **qualification structure** that includes the qualification title and any components required to achieve it
- ◆ appropriate **assessment** methods and instruments
- ◆ **quality assurance** which maintains the rigour of the assessment

You might also want to:

- ◆ credit rate your qualifications on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- ◆ signpost your qualification for Core Skills

There may be SQA Accreditation approved qualification products already available. We use the term **qualification products** to describe the following:

- ◆ qualification structures
- ◆ assessment strategies — sometimes referred to as assessment principles
- ◆ Core Skills signposting

If qualification products are approved awarding bodies must use them as the basis of qualification development.

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)

Each SVQ will already have an SCQF credit-rated qualification structure, an assessment strategy and Core Skills signposting that has been approved by SQA Accreditation. It is essential that awarding bodies use the SQA Accreditation approved versions as the basis of qualifications. If no qualification products exist, you may not seek accreditation and should discuss the possibility of developing qualification products with the relevant SSO and an accreditation manager.

Other qualifications (including Regulatory and Licensing)

Where other qualifications have been designed by an SSO, qualification products that have been approved by SQA Accreditation will be available. These can be obtained from the SSO or SQA Accreditation and must form the basis of your qualification development.

If the qualification is designed and developed wholly by an awarding body rather than an SSO, there is no need to use already-approved qualification products as part of the accreditation process.

1.2 Engage with your accreditation manager

It is recommended that you engage with your accreditation manager at an early stage of the qualification development process. Your AM will scrutinise and assess your qualification, before deciding if it is ready to be presented to Accreditation Co-ordination Group (ACG) for an approval decision.

Unexpected issues at this final stage can lead to a significant delay in the accreditation of your qualification. This can have major implications on implementation plans. To avoid any major issues being identified it is essential to involve your AM at all stages of your qualification development.

Dependent on your qualification development methodology, you could involve your AM by:

- ◆ providing regular project updates
- ◆ inviting them to meetings, including workshops and key stakeholder group meetings
- ◆ discussing SCQF credit rating requirements and methodology
- ◆ requesting credit rating training if appropriate, and involving your AM in credit rating activity
- ◆ copying them into minutes of meetings
- ◆ submitting draft documents to them for feedback
- ◆ sharing your consultation methodology and questions prior to circulation
- ◆ sharing your analysis of consultation responses

It is important that you consult with Scottish stakeholders to ensure that your qualification is fit for purpose in Scotland. Involving the AM does not constitute Scottish consultation — we do not represent industry sectors. Our involvement is to ensure that the qualification development is conducted according to our requirements.

2 Applying your process for qualification development

In accordance with our regulatory requirements, specifically Regulatory Principles 10 to 13, you must have a process for planning qualification development for Scotland. Following your process should allow you to:

- ◆ identify the need for a qualification
- ◆ establish the purpose for the development or review of a qualification
- ◆ enable engagement with appropriate stakeholders
- ◆ determine the structure and content of the qualification
- ◆ identify an assessment methodology and instruments of assessment
- ◆ determine a quality assurance process
- ◆ identify a network for delivery
- ◆ ensure a qualification is supported by Scottish stakeholders and is fit for purpose

Our expectation is that you will follow your process when developing qualifications. There must be evidence of this in your accreditation submission.

3 Developing a qualification for accreditation

3.1 What is accreditation?

By 'accredit' or 'accreditation' we mean the process by which SQA Accreditation decides whether an awarding body satisfies our regulatory requirements that are necessary to successfully award and certificate a unit or qualification.

We accredit:

- ◆ qualifications developed from approved qualification products — examples of such qualifications are SVQs, Regulatory and Licensing qualifications, and Workplace Core Skills
- ◆ qualifications designed and developed by you

Qualifications are accredited for a finite period. When a qualification reaches the end of its accreditation period, it must be withdrawn, extended or replaced by an updated qualification.

3.2 Qualifications based on approved qualification products

Some of the qualifications we accredit are based on qualification products approved by ACG. Once these are approved, they are available to develop into qualifications. What constitutes qualification products and how these are designed is described in *Developing Qualification Products for SQA Accreditation Approval: A Guide for Submitting Organisations*.

It is an awarding body's responsibility to obtain ACG approved qualification products and develop them into a full qualification ready for accreditation. All approved qualification products include the date and the latest version number when they were approved by ACG. You can obtain these from the SSO or download the approved qualification structures from our website. You can contact us for copies of any qualification products not currently available through our website.

You should discuss your intention to offer these qualifications with the SSO. They may be able to provide information from the development of the qualifications, such as Labour Market Intelligence (LMI), employer contacts, and occupational mapping. When it comes to making your submission for accreditation, we would normally expect evidence of support from the SSO and employers.

You should also contact an accreditation manager to discuss your intentions to make an accreditation submission.

3.3 Qualifications not based on approved qualification products

We accredit qualifications developed by awarding bodies not based on approved qualification products. These qualifications might be based wholly or partly on NOS or not at all. These would not normally be submitted to SQA Accreditation for prior approval as this would be implicit in the accreditation process.

You must contact an accreditation manager at the earliest possible opportunity to discuss your qualification. We need to know how you developed it so that we can confirm it is appropriate for accreditation. You should also discuss your intentions to make an accreditation submission.

3.4 Qualification structure

The qualifications structure document lists the title, any units that make up the qualification, combinations of units and SCQF credit rating (if credit rated).

Using approved qualification products

If you are offering a qualification that is based on approved qualification products, you must use the exact title and unit titles from the approved structure. No SVQ qualification titles may be adapted to include the name of the awarding body, though this is permissible for other qualifications. The approved qualification products are available from the SSO or SQA Accreditation.

You can choose to offer the full approved qualification structure. You also have the flexibility to select which optional units you wish to include in your qualification, providing you meet the minimum requirements of the approved qualification structure.

Some approved qualification structures will have multiple pathways. You will need to determine whether your registration and certification system allows you to implement and certificate all the pathways as a single qualification or whether you will have to split them into separate qualifications for each pathway you wish to offer. You may not wish to use all available pathways, and this must be explained clearly in your AC2 accreditation submission.

Designing and developing your own qualifications

Where there are no approved qualification products, you need to design your own qualification structures. Remember that when seeking accreditation you will have to provide a rationale and evidence that the qualification is fit for purpose in Scotland.

The title of a qualification or unit must be unique and reflect its function and content, and where appropriate, the context.

You should consider the relationship between qualifications when allocating titles. Decide whether it is sufficient to have different levels of qualifications with the same title. For example, a qualification in Management at SCQF level 8 and a qualification in Management at SCQF level 10 may not clearly indicate differences between content and complexity whereas qualifications in Management at SCQF level 8 and Strategic Management at SCQF level 10 may.

The word 'level' must only be used when referring to an SCQF level.

See *Regulatory Principles Directive RPDIR-4 — Titling Conventions for SCQF Credit Rated Qualifications* for full information on qualification titling.

It is also important to consider flexibility, progression and overlap.

Flexibility and progression

Where possible, you should try to ensure that learners:

- ◆ have a choice of units
- ◆ are able to gain recognition for relevant prior achievement
- ◆ have opportunities to progress to higher level or other qualifications

Overlap

You must consider how your qualification relates to other qualifications. Use of a large number of identical units in different qualification structures can lead to achievement by default, with minimal or no additional work required from learners. This would generally not be approved by ACG. Contact your AM for further advice.

3.5 Develop an assessment methodology

You must have a written methodology on how to assess your qualification.

The methodology should define:

- ◆ **Where the qualification will be assessed**
Depending on the type of qualification it may be assessed in the workplace; in a realistic working environment; in a controlled exam environment.
- ◆ **How the qualification will be assessed**
Evidence of knowledge and ability may be provided through observation; portfolio of evidence; witness testimony; professional interview; exam; coursework; log books.
- ◆ **Who will assess the qualification**
Personnel involved in the assessment need to have relevant qualifications and experience in order to be able to make professional assessment judgements.

- ◆ **How the qualification will be quality assured**

The qualification may be quality assured via procedures for ensuring the quality of the testing as well as the quality of marking.

- ◆ **Who will quality assure the qualification**

Personnel involved in quality assurance may include internal verifiers; external verifiers; markers; invigilators.

If you are developing a qualification using approved qualification products, you will be provided with an assessment strategy. Your assessment methodology must be developed from the approved assessment strategy. It is important to note that your methodology should not repeat the content of the assessment strategy. You must give some thought to how you want to implement this across your providers. Your methodology might not be an individual document, but it is a critical aspect of accreditation and must be reflected in your AC2 submission.

3.6 SCQF credit rating

Accreditation and SCQF credit rating are two separate processes, and are independent of each other. Credit rating can be carried out on its own or in parallel with the qualification development. It is mandatory to SCQF credit-rate SVQs and qualifications contained in the mandatory section of Scottish Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. We encourage credit rating of all our accredited qualifications. SCQF credit rating can be carried out by a standards setting organisation or awarding bodies for their own qualifications and brought to SQA Accreditation for approval.

If you are considering creating your own qualification with SCQF credit rating, you must consult with your Accreditation Manager. You can download the *Credit Rating of SQA Accredited Qualifications for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework — Guidance for Sector Skills Councils, Standards Setting Organisations, Awarding Bodies and Participants* from our website.

When developing a qualification based on approved products, the qualification structure will include the SCQF level and credit value for the qualification and component units.

If you are not implementing the full approved qualification structure, the minimum and maximum credit values might have to be recalculated, and these will have to be notified to ACG at the point of accreditation. In this scenario, the accredited qualification structure will differ from the ACG approved qualification structure.

Any available or approved SCQF credit rating information must be incorporated into your documentation and/or certificates.

If you are reviewing the credit rating of a current qualification, you should consider your approach. For example, it may not be necessary to undertake a full credit rating exercise. It may be more effective to consult with providers and candidates on whether the credit rating values appropriately reflect the time taken

to complete a unit and whether the level is accurate. A meeting should then be held with representatives of the sector to discuss an agreed approach to updating the credit rating. You must discuss your approach to reviewing credit rating with your AM.

3.7 Develop Core Skills signposting

‘Signposting’ indicates where Core Skills may be attained through delivery and assessment of the qualification.

Please note that the Core Skills signposting required by SQA Accreditation is not the same as the Core Skills mapping required by the Modern Apprenticeship Group for MA frameworks. Mapping is a more detailed description of where Core Skills will definitely be achieved by candidates completing the qualification. The details of mapping requirements should be confirmed with Skills Development Scotland. Mapping is not required for accredited qualifications.

If your qualification is an SVQ, the Core Skills signposting will have been prepared by the standards setting organisation. We expect you to include this in your support materials so that providers can plan Core Skills assessment.

You may choose to develop a Core Skills signposting for other types of qualifications, but this is not mandatory. If you do so, you will need to complete the *SQA Accreditation Core Skills Signposting Template* (see appendix 1) when submitting your document for approval.

3.8 Developing support materials for any qualification

Qualifications must be supported by additional information. You will need to decide what supporting information is appropriate for delivery, assessment and quality assurance of the qualification. This can include evidence requirements.

Support materials can be developed collaboratively with other awarding bodies, if appropriate. This is sometimes done in conjunction with the SSO with the aim of standardising the approach across awarding bodies and providers.

Support materials can include:

- ◆ guidance for those assessing
- ◆ guidance for candidates, including what they must achieve to get the qualification
- ◆ qualification specification
- ◆ assessment methods
- ◆ instruments of assessment, eg question banks
- ◆ assessment requirements which are specified by a regulatory body or designed by you to support the qualification (eg this may include how you will meet any requirements as detailed in the assessment strategy)

- ◆ evidence requirements or assessment criteria (this may include the type, amount and standard of evidence to be produced)
- ◆ qualifications and experience of those involved in the delivery and assessment of the qualification and how you will ensure that these requirements are met
- ◆ description of the conditions of assessment (eg assessment under invigilated conditions)
- ◆ any other specific arrangements or requirements — this may include timescales for delivery, qualifications and experience of those delivering the qualifications or production of question papers etc
- ◆ any additional/specific requirements of the assessment strategy and how you will meet these requirements

For qualifications based on approved qualification products, you must provide the ACG approved assessment strategy document and information on how you are going to implement its requirements.

SQA Accreditation does not approve support materials, but there is an expectation that you would provide evidence of them in your accreditation submission. Support materials will also be subject to scrutiny under our regulatory activity. The documentation that you produce in relation to your qualification must therefore make appropriate references to SQA Accreditation and our Regulatory Principles.

3.9 Developing quality assurance

Qualifications must be supported by appropriate quality assurance. You will need to decide what quality assurance mechanism is appropriate for the qualification. It is mandatory that there are internal and external elements to the quality assurance. It is essential that the quality assurance maintains the rigour of the assessment.

Who is involved?

The quality assurance personnel will vary depending on the type of assessment being used for the qualification. Examples of personnel include examiners, assessors, markers, invigilators and verifiers. All the roles should be clearly defined, and the people undertaking these roles must have appropriate experience and qualifications to do them.

What do they do?

The quality assurance personnel will ensure that the quality of assessment is maintained. This may be through setting assessments, agreeing marking schemes, ensuring authentication of evidence, ensuring the assessment process is followed, and ensuring assessment conditions are maintained.

Exam papers may require a different quality assurance regime in terms of their production, review of content and performance of the questions, and the standardisation of the outcomes through pass mark review.

Where do they do it?

The quality assurance personnel may carry out their activities in a range of places. This may be in the workplace, classroom, online, under examination conditions or remotely.

Quality assurance of workplace qualifications will often be in the workplace, as this is the default location for assessment and the evidence may be fixed to the location. It may also be in a provider or at a remote location as the evidence itself may be portable or virtual, eg photographic, digital, documentary etc.

Quality assurance personnel must confirm that SVQs have not been totally simulated as SVQs are intended to demonstrate performance consistently in the workplace over a period of time. They may also have a role in approving simulations designed by providers.

When and how often?

Assessment could be carried out continuously or at specific times, and the quality assurance regime must respond to this. The quality assurance activity must take place at appropriate times to ensure timely certification.

Risk assessment of qualifications and the providers may determine the type and frequency of interventions and sample sizes.

What do you do to ensure standardisation?

Standardisation can be maintained by various methods. This may include attending regular meeting or training events; sampling of evidence, marking and reports; analysing performance of questions in examinations.

3.10 Marketing your qualifications

Qualifications must be supported by marketing materials. You will need to decide what marketing is appropriate to promote the qualification. This can include hand-outs, website updates, leaflets, mailings to providers/candidates, launch events.

SQA Accreditation does not approve marketing materials, but there is an expectation that you would outline your marketing activity for a qualification in your accreditation submission. Your strategic marketing plan may also be subject to scrutiny under our regulatory activity.

4 Accreditation of qualifications

4.1 The qualification accreditation process

Your qualifications will be submitted for accreditation on an AC2 form. The current version of the form is available on our website. There is also guidance available in *Developing Qualification Products for SQA Accreditation Approval: A Guide for Submitting Organisations* explaining the different types of submissions and information we require for:

- ◆ accreditations
- ◆ re-accreditations
- ◆ amendments
- ◆ extensions
- ◆ withdrawals

Preparing your submission

When preparing a submission, please speak to the accreditation manager for the sector for advice and to inform us that the submission will be made. A list of accreditation managers and their sectors is available on our website.

If the submitted qualification is designed to replace an existing one, please allow enough time for us to process the submission to avoid a gap in your provision.

All submissions and supporting documentation must make appropriate reference to SQA Accreditation and the Regulatory Principles.

The accreditation process

The submission must be sent to SQA Accreditation at accredquals@sqa.org.uk.

When we receive your submission, we will acknowledge receipt by e-mail, log it, and pass it to the relevant AM.

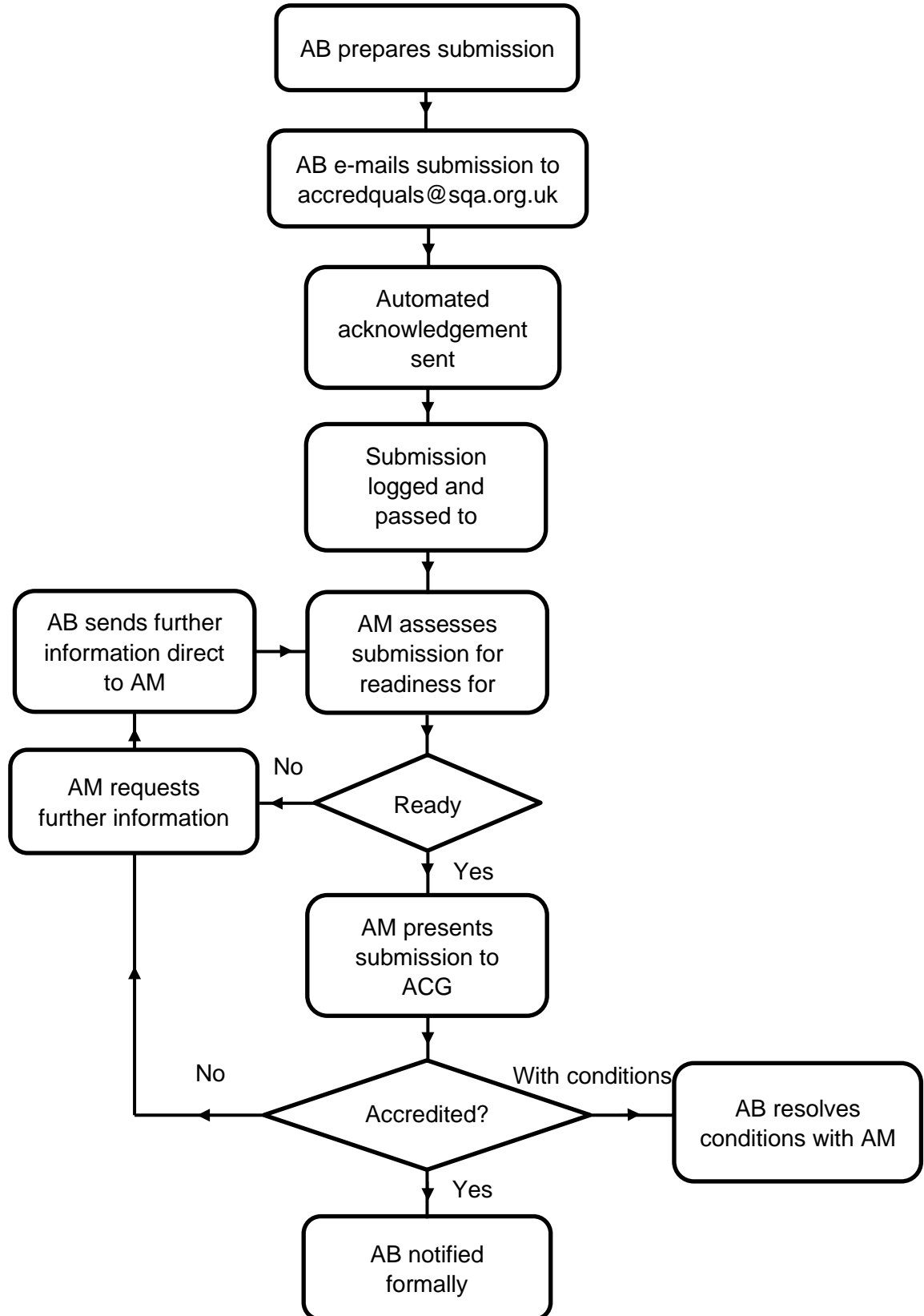
The AM will assess the submission within 20 working days and will liaise directly with you for any clarification or further information. When your AM has agreed that your submission is ready, they will present your submission to ACG, our decision-making committee.

ACG normally meets weekly. It is made up of six core members of staff from SQA Accreditation:

- ◆ Head of Accreditation
- ◆ Senior Accreditation Manager
- ◆ Senior Regulation Manager
- ◆ Information and Research Manager
- ◆ Accreditation Officer

In addition to this, ACG includes an AM and a Regulation representative on a rota basis.

The diagram below shows the accreditation process:



4.2 Approval decisions

ACG will consider the AC2 and the AM's recommendations, and make one of the following decisions:

- ◆ approve
- ◆ approve with conditions
- ◆ defer

We will notify you of the decision, including any conditions or any reasons for deferral.

4.3 Post-ACG

We will issue you with a decision letter advising you of ACG's decision shortly after the meeting. If your accreditation submission is successful, we will advise you of the accreditation end-date and certification end-date for the qualification and supply you with a copy of the accredited structure. There may be conditions attached to the accreditation and these will be detailed in the decision letter.

A series of further actions follow on from this:

- ◆ A copy of the accredited structure, with SCQF credit rating if available, will be posted on SQA Accreditation's website. You will be able to find it under the Search for Accredited Structures function.
- ◆ Decision lists are published weekly, one week after the date of the ACG meeting.
- ◆ Your qualification will be added to the qualifications listing report, which lists all accredited qualifications and is published monthly on our website.
- ◆ If the qualification was developed by another body, as in the case of SVQs, they will be notified of the accreditation.
- ◆ Following approval at ACG, the qualification is assigned a 4+2 group award code, and we will send you a letter informing you of the code. SVQ codes will be issued approximately three weeks after the approval decision is made. Other qualification codes will be issued approximately two weeks after the approval decision is made.
- ◆ We upload SCQF credit rating information for accredited qualifications onto the SCQF database. It will be available on the SCQF database once group award codes are available if the qualification has been credit rated.

If you are dissatisfied about an ACG decision, *The Appeals Process: Information for awarding bodies and standard setting organisations* explains how you can make an appeal. You can download it from our website.

5 Reviewing and maintaining qualifications

In accordance with our regulatory requirements, you have a responsibility for monitoring your qualifications on the SQA Accreditation Listing Report and ensuring that submissions for reaccreditation, extension or withdrawal are made to SQA Accreditation at least one month before your current qualifications lapse. It is good practice for you to start your review at least three months before the lapse date of a qualification. If you do not wish to continue to offer a qualification beyond the lapsing date, you must submit a withdrawal request.

You need to be aware of any reviews of NOS or qualification products by other organisations and once you know the timescales for any review, you may wish to consider extending your current qualification in line with the review timescales. You should consider applying for an extension that would give you sufficient time to develop the qualification products into a qualification.

During the accreditation period, you should gather intelligence about the performance of the qualification. Stakeholders — providers, candidates, employer networks and staff involved in the delivery and quality assurance of the qualification — should be consulted. It is good practice to ask for regular feedback from these stakeholders. This information could be used to update the qualification when it is time for review. The review process should mirror the development process.

After your qualification has been live for two years, you should review uptake and performance in line with *SQA Accreditation's Zero Uptake Policy* and take appropriate action. Further details of this can be found in the Regulatory Policies section on our website.

Appendix 1: SQA Accreditation Core Skills Signposting Template

You should use this template if you are an awarding body designing and developing your own qualification. If you are using an SSO qualification, then you should use the ACG approved core skills signposting (delete this text before submitting).

Core Skills Signposting

Qualification Title(s)	
Developed by	
Approved by ACG	
Version	

Introduction

Core Skills signposting indicates if there are opportunities within units to develop Core Skills in the workplace to a specified SCQF level. The signposting document should also acknowledge where there are no opportunities to develop Core Skills. This signposting can be used by providers and assessors to plan the development and assessment of Core Skills.

The five Core Skills are:

- Communication
- Information and Communication Technology
- Numeracy
- Problem Solving
- Working with Others

SSO may insert additional introductory text to contextualise the core skills signposting to their sector

Core Skills Signposting

Qualification or Suite Title

URN	Unit title	Communication	ICT	Numeracy	Problem Solving	Working with Others

All numbers refer to SCQF level – any blanks indicate no opportunity.